

Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday 26 September 2023, 6:00pm

In Conference Room 2 at the Council House, Walsall

Committee Members present:

Councillor Hicken (Chair)
Councillor Jukes (Vice Chair)
Councillor Garcha
Councillor Harrison
Councillor Nasreen
Councillor Rattigan
Councillor C. Statham
Councillor Whitehouse

Officers present:

Isabelle Vanderheeren	Director, Early Help
Rita Homer	Director, Children's Social Work
Philip Rutherford	Strategic Lead – Youth Justice
Nikki Gough	Democratic Services Officer

9 Apologies

Apologies were received on behalf of Councillor Latham.

10 Substitutions

There were no substitutions.

11 Declarations of interest and party whip

No declarations of interest or party whip were received.

12 Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)

There were no agenda items requiring the exclusion of the public.

13 Minutes

A copy of the minutes of the meeting held on 27 June 2023 was submitted.

[Annexed]

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 27 June 2023, a copy having previously been circulated, be approved and signed by the Chair as a true and accurate record.

14 Youth Justice

The Strategic Lead – Youth Justice introduced the report and highlighted the salient points (annexed). The Committee was presented with an overview of the annual youth justice plan to provide information on how youth justice services were provided and funded. It was noted that it was a statutory duty to provide an annual youth justice plan.

Members were advised that the principle aim of the Youth Justice Strategic partnership was to prevent and reduce offending and re-offending behaviour in children and young people and had three main national key performance indicators which were reducing the number of young people entering the justice system for the first time, reducing re-offending, and reducing the use of custodial disposals.

Further to this the youth justice annual plan identified 5 main priorities:

1. Transitions and resettlement.
2. Reducing serious youth violence.
3. Responding to disproportionality.
4. Identifying and responding to unmet need (health).
5. Voice of our children.

Further detail was provided on the disproportionality priority. The Committee was informed that national data and research suggested that compared to white children convicted of an offence, all minority ethnic groups were more likely to be male. They were convicted of offences with a higher-than-average severity, offences were more likely to involve a knife, and their cases were more likely to be heard at Crown Court. Members were advised that in Walsall there was a good understanding of local data and trends informed by a 2-year data review and monthly monitoring. This was in line with national themes.

The Strategic Lead stated that a documentary had been produced on the disproportionality faced by black and mixed heritage boys in the Youth Justice System in Walsall and the solutions that were needed with the aim of addressing the issues around disproportionality, narrowing the equality gap and improving outcomes for children growing up in the Borough.

In response to questions asked by Members of the Committee, Officers confirmed that the Police worked with the Youth Justice Service to address disproportionality issues and recognise such issues. Officers confirmed that this was a whole societal issue as evidenced by the Lammy review – stressing that all organisations had a duty to change. It was confirmed that language barriers had not presented an issue when young people were taken into custody, and translators were used when needed.

The Director (Early Help) stressed that young people were disadvantaged from birth, and throughout the education system. It was therefore important that the equality

gap was addressed to give children the best start in life – this was a partnership issue.

In response to challenge by Members, it was confirmed that a key performance indicator was to ensure that children of school age were achieving academically. The Youth Justice Service had links with the inclusion hub, and the employment and skills team. It was highlighted that when a young person entered the youth justice system opportunities had been missed. Officers stated that youth justice was an integrated team, and once young people were in the youth justice system, they were able to access the right resources and a coordinated plan (which they had to engage with). Officers stated that a partnership with social care was critical to support the whole family.

A discussion ensued in relation to the presence of appropriate adults at police interviews, the Youth Justice Lead stated that where a parent was not available the youth justice service provided an 'appropriate adult' to support the young person. Officers stated that the Police were provided with information in relation to the young person to ensure the needs of children were met. Members challenged how quickly this information was provided, and it was stressed that this should be done as quickly as possible to ensure the best interests of the child were met. Officers stated that children's services were working with the police to ensure that a 'child first' approach was taken, however it was acknowledged that the police focused on the investigation and that the appropriate adult would focus on the needs of the young person.

Resolved that:

- The Committee noted the annual youth justice plan.
- An agenda item on violence (youth justice) be scheduled for a future committee, with an invitation extended to partners.

15 Recommendation Tracker

The Committee received the tracker of recommendations from previous meetings, including progress made and outstanding items.

[Annexed]

Resolved:

That the recommendation tracker be noted.

16 Areas of Focus

Resolved that:

The Committee considered the areas of focus item and agreed that the following items should be added:

- Children with disabilities.
- An update on children's services.

17 **Date of next meeting**

The next meeting would be 2 November 2023

There being no further business this meeting was terminated at 7:15pm.

Signed:

Date: